



Using Essay Revisions to Help Students Succeed

Based on my experience as an English instructor, I am convinced the learning process is much more like a winding, looping rollercoaster than a vector on a graph. While learning can steadily incline, I've found most "light bulb moments" occur when students are given second chances at success.

Despite my beliefs about the learning process, I was apprehensive about letting my students revise and rewrite essays for better grades. I've felt a need to incorporate essay revisions into my courses, but I was skeptical about giving myself one more assignment to grade or regrade. Pragmatism plagued me, dredging up questions like, "How do I set up an Essay Revision?" "Will I allow only certain essays to be revised?" and "What will the grading rubric look like?" When I attended NISOD's 2018 International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence, my assumptions and gut feelings about allowing essay revisions were confirmed. I sat in on several sessions at the conference that all focused on the same theme: Students learn better when they are given second chances. I was so inspired by the sessions that following the conference, I developed an essay revision rubric and agreement I would use during the 2018 fall semester.

First Revisions

I developed the essay revision rubric and agreement for my Composition I course. In that class, students are permitted to correct any major essay assigned during the semester. In the essay students chooses to revise, they must address my corrections, comments, and suggestions I made on their original submissions. Based on the rubric provided and the level of corrections students make to their revised essays, students can receive anywhere between 5 to 15 additional points to their essay grades. Students cannot earn a grade higher than 100 points on their essays.

To receive 5 additional points on a revised essay, a student must address at least 50 percent of the corrections, comments, and suggestions I wrote on the original essay. To receive 10 points on the revised essay, students must address 75 percent of the issues, and students can receive an additional 15 points for addressing 90 to 100 percent of the corrections in a revised essay. Finally, students must also meet with me or a tutor from the tutoring center to discuss the corrections they made to their original essays before they can submit their revisions. The session with me or the tutor ensures

students understand why their corrections were needed.

Second Chances

Even though this is my first time allowing students to revise essays in my classes, I have noticed several benefits the revisions have had on my students.

By allowing essay revisions, students are able to do better on their next essays. I believe many of us have been in situations, academically or otherwise, where we wished for a second chance, a chance to make different choices. Essay revisions allow students to go back, see what needs more attention in their work, and make it better. My students' responses to the opportunity to improve upon their original work echoed similar sentiments: "I like that I'm able to see what I did wrong and fix it." and "It's nice to get another chance."

Building Confidence

English is an inherently intimate and subjective discipline. Writers share their personal ideas, opinions, and connections about a topic with readers in hopes readers will understand their thoughts. The transparency, honesty, and confidence writing requires is, at times, uncomfortable. Quite often I hear students say how they're not confident in their writing skills or that they weren't taught how to write well. Being able to see why a certain component of an assignment is incorrect, and then being able to fix it, plants seeds of confidence within students. During a revision, students can learn from their mistakes and become more aware of their weaknesses and strengths. Following the revision assignment, students are aware of their weaknesses and are able to work on improving those skills going forward. When students are required to participate in a similar essay assignment in my class, they have the confidence and skills to complete it successfully.

Making Learning Personal

When students decide to revise an essay, they are choosing to make their learning personal. When they submit a revised essay, students demonstrate they want to learn and do better than before; the students are taking ownership of their learning by showing they want to successfully understanding a concept.

Conclusion

The learning process isn't a perfect linear incline. At times, students do not understand the course content and make mistakes on their assignments and exams. It is during those times students have the opportunity to learn

from their mistakes and grow their learning. Based on my experiences, one way to help students when mistakes have been made is to allow for assignment revisions. Assignment revisions not only help students learn from their mistakes, build self-confidence, and take ownership of their learning, they also promote student success.

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